

CONSUMER INFORMATION FROM USDA

Food Safety and Inspection Service, *Food Safety & Consumer Education Office*
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Basics for Handling Food Safely

Safe steps in food handling, cooking, and storage are essential to avoiding foodborne illness. You can't see, smell, or taste bacteria which may be on any food. Follow these food safety guidelines to keep pathogens away.

Safe Shopping

Buy cold food last; get it home fast.

- Never choose packages which are torn or leaking.
- Don't buy foods past "sell-by" or expiration dates.
- Put raw meat and poultry into a plastic bag so meat juices won't cross-contaminate cooked foods or those eaten raw, such as vegetables or fruit.
- Place refrigerated or frozen items in the shopping cart last, right before heading for the checkout counter.
- When loading the car, keep perishable items inside the air-conditioned car -- not in the trunk.
- Drive immediately home from the grocery. If you live farther away than 30 minutes, bring a cooler with ice from home; place perishables in it.

Safe Storage of Foods

Keep it safe; refrigerate.

- Unload perishable foods from the car first and immediately refrigerate them. Place securely wrapped packages of raw meat, poultry, or fish in the meat drawer or coldest section of your refrigerator.
- Check the temperature of your unit with an appliance thermometer. To slow bacterial growth, the refrigerator should be at 40 °F; the freezer, 0 °F.

- Cook or freeze fresh poultry, fish, ground meats, and variety meats within 2 days; other beef, veal, lamb, or pork, within 3 to 5 days.

Safe Food Preparation

Keep everything clean!

- Wash hands before and after handling raw meat and poultry.
- Sanitize cutting boards often in a solution of 1 teaspoon chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water. Wash kitchen towels and cloths often in hot water in washing machine.
- Don't cross-contaminate. Keep raw meat, poultry, fish, and their juices away from other food. After cutting raw meats, wash hands, cutting board, knife, and counter tops with hot, soapy water.
- Marinate meat and poultry in a covered dish in the refrigerator.

Thaw Food Safely

Refrigerator: Allows slow, safe thawing. Make sure thawing juices do not drip on other foods.

Cold Water: For faster thawing, place food in a leak-proof plastic bag and submerge in cold tap water.

Microwave: Cook meat and poultry immediately after microwave thawing.

Call Toll-free For More Information:

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline
1 (800) 535-4555
Washington DC (202) 720-3333
TTY: 1 (800) 256-7072
Web site: <http://www.usda.gov/fsis>
Fast Fax: 1 (800) 238-8281

Safe Cooking

Cook ground meats to 160 °F; ground poultry to 165 °F. Beef, veal and lamb steaks, roasts, and chops may be cooked to 145 °F; all cuts of fresh pork, 160 °F. Whole poultry should reach 180 °F in the thigh; breasts, 170 °F.

Serving Food Safely

Never leave it out over 2 hours.

(1 hour in temperatures above 90 °F) Bacteria that cause foodborne illness grow rapidly at room temperature.

Keep hot food hot! Cold food cold!

- When serving food at a buffet, keep hot food over a heat source and keep cold food on ice. Keep platters of food refrigerated until time to serve or heat them.
- Carry perishable picnic food in a cooler with a cold pack or ice. Set the cooler in the shade and open the lid as little as possible.

Handling Leftovers Safely

- Divide foods into shallow containers for rapid cooling. Put food directly in the refrigerator or freezer.
- Cut turkey off the bone and refrigerate. Slice breast meat; legs and wings may be left whole.
- Use cooked leftovers within 4 days.

Refreezing Food

Meat and poultry defrosted in the refrigerator may be refrozen before OR after cooking. If thawed by other methods, cook before refreezing.

Cold Storage Chart

Since product dates aren't a guide for safe use of a product, consult this chart and follow these tips. These short but safe time limits will help keep refrigerated food (40 °F) from spoiling or becoming dangerous.

- Purchase the product before "sell-by" or expiration dates.
- Follow handling recommendations on product.
- Keep meat and poultry in its package until just before using.
- If freezing meat and poultry in its original package longer than 2 months, overwrap these packages with airtight heavy-duty foil, plastic wrap, or freezer paper, or place the package inside a plastic bag.

Because freezing (0 °F) keeps food safe indefinitely, recommended storage times are for quality only.

Product	Refrigerator		Product	Refrigerator	Freezer
Eggs			Hot Dogs & Lunch Meats		(in freezer wrap)
Fresh, in shell	3 weeks	Don't freeze	Hot dogs, opened package	1 week	1 to 2 months
Raw yolks, whites	2 to 4 days	1 year	unopened package	2 weeks	1 to 2 months
Hard cooked	1 week	Don't freeze well	Lunch meats, opened package	3 to 5 days	1 to 2 months
Liquid pasteurized eggs			unopened package	2 weeks	1 to 2 months
or egg substitutes, opened	3 days	Don't freeze	Soups & Stews		
unopened	10 days	1 year	Vegetable or meat-added	3 to 4 days	2 to 3 months
Mayonnaise, commercial			Bacon & Sausage		
Refrigerate after opening	2 months	Don't freeze	Bacon	7 days	1 month
TV Dinners, Frozen Casseroles			Sausage, raw from pork, beef,	1 to 2 days	1 to 2 months
Keep frozen until ready to heat		3 to 4 months	chicken or turkey		
Deli & Vacuum-Packed Products			Smoked breakfast links, patties	7 days	1 to 2 months
Store-prepared (or homemade)	3 to 5 days	Don't freeze well	Summer sausage labeled		
egg, chicken, tuna, ham,			"Keep Refrigerated," unopened	3 months	1 to 2 months
macaroni salads			opened	3 weeks	1 to 2 months
Pre-stuffed pork & lamb chops,	1 day	Don't freeze well	Fresh Meat (Beef, Veal, Lamb & Pork)		
chicken breasts stuffed w/dressing			Steaks	3 to 5 days	6 to 12 months
Store-cooked convenience meals	3 to 4 days	Don't freeze well	Chops	3 to 5 days	4 to 6 months
Commercial brand vacuum-packed			Roasts	3 to 5 days	4 to 12 months
dinners w/ USDA seal, unopened	2 weeks	Don't freeze well	Variety meats (tongue, kidneys,	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months
Raw Hamburger, Ground & Stew Meat			liver, heart, chitterlings)		
Hamburger & stew meats	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months	Meat Leftovers		
Ground turkey, veal, pork, lamb	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months	Cooked meat and meat dishes	3 to 4 days	2 to 3 months
& mixtures of them			Gravy and meat broth	1 to 2 days	2 to 3 months
Ham, Corned Beef			Fresh Poultry		
Corned beef in pouch	5 to 7 days	drained, 1 month	Chicken or turkey, whole	1 to 2 days	1 year
with pickling juices			Chicken or turkey, parts	1 to 2 days	9 months
Ham, canned, labeled			Giblets	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months
"Keep Refrigerated," unopened	6 to 9 months	Don't freeze	Cooked Poultry, Leftover		
opened	3 to 5 days	1 to 2 months	Fried chicken	3 to 4 days	4 months
Ham, fully cooked, whole	7 days	1 to 2 months	Cooked poultry dishes	3 to 4 days	4 to 6 months
Ham, fully cooked, half	3 to 5 days	1 to 2 months	Pieces, plain	3 to 4 days	4 months
Ham, fully cooked, slices	3 to 4 days	1 to 2 months	Pieces covered with broth, gravy	1 to 2 days	6 months
			Chicken nuggets, patties	1 to 2 days	1 to 3 months